

Day 19: Vines by PaperBodies

Series: [Harringrove April Challenge \[11\]](#)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: First Kiss, Getting Together, M/M, Post S3, References To Sleeping Beauty, The Upside Down

Language: English

Characters: Billy Hargrove, Steve Harrington, The Party (Stranger Things)

Relationships: Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington

Status: Completed

Published: 2021-04-20

Updated: 2021-04-20

Packaged: 2022-04-01 01:30:05

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,607

Publisher: [archiveofourown.org](#)

Summary:

When Steve dropped into the Upside Down, he took a minute to look around in disbelief.

“What the fuck?” he muttered to himself. He wasn’t looking at a dark, burned out version of Hawkins, with the familiar moving vines and ash floating in the air. Instead, he was staring out at a set of rolling hills, covered in vibrant green grass. Off in the distance, he could see the highest tower of a castle. There was a dark haze around it.

“Steve, do you copy?” The radio in his hand crackled to life.

“Yeah, I copy. You guys aren’t going to believe this.” He explained what he was seeing and the nerds insisted that he stay put while they had a quick emergency meeting to talk it out. He walked a little further out of the tunnel he was in to get a better look around. A dark line of forest was visible off to his right, and he thought he heard the sound of waves off in the distance to his left. He had no idea what to make of it.

Day 19: Vines

When Steve dropped into the Upside Down, he took a minute to look around in disbelief.

“What the fuck?” he muttered to himself. He wasn’t looking at a dark, burned out version of Hawkins, with the familiar moving vines and ash floating in the air. Instead, he was staring out at a set of rolling hills, covered in vibrant green grass. Off in the distance, he could see the highest tower of a castle. There was a dark haze around it.

“Steve, do you copy?” The radio in his hand crackled to life.

“Yeah, I copy. You guys aren’t going to believe this.” He explained what he was seeing and the nerds insisted that he stay put while they had a quick emergency meeting to talk it out. He walked a little further out of the tunnel he was in to get a better look around. A dark line of forest was visible off to his right, and he thought he heard the sound of waves off in the distance to his left. He had no idea what to make of it.

“Ok, are you there? Steve?” Dustin’s voice was anxious when Steve didn’t respond immediately.

“Yeah, I’m here.”

“Ok, so our working hypothesis is that the Mindflayer is affecting your perception in some way. Have you touched anything?”

“Not yet.”

“Ok, so close your eyes, and then reach down and see what you feel.” Steve closed his eyes and reached tentatively for the ground. He felt the vines he had expected to see slithering away from him. The ground was cold. When he opened his eyes, he saw only grass. The disconnect started to give him a headache, but it disappeared as soon as he straightened up.

“What,” he whispered.

“Did it work? What happened?” Dustin’s voice demanded.

“Yeah, it worked. It’s definitely still the Upside Down.”

“Ok, so it’s messing with your head.”

“How?” Steve asked. “I’m not possessed. Right?” He was suddenly nervous about it.

“No. Well, probably not. It’s just stronger there, so it can affect you without possessing you first.”

“Ok, but why bother?” There was a long silence.

“We’re working on it. In the meantime, be really careful, and tell us everything that you see.” Steve nodded and then remembered that they couldn’t see him.

“Got it.” He tucked the radio back into his pocket and left the goggles and bandana on. No need to take unnecessary risks. He took a deep breath and walked out into the expanse of grass.

He headed for the castle, since it was the only actual landmark that he could see. As he got closer, the haze around the castle resolved into thick, twining vines covered in thorns. Steve shook his head and got the radio out.

“Hey guys?” he asked.

“What’s up, buddy?” Dustin asked after a brief pause.

“I’m looking at a castle surrounded by vines.” There was a pause.

“Are there thorns on the vines?”

“Yes?” Steve said. “I’m not sure why that’s relevant.” There was a longer pause. “Dustin?” Steve finally asked.

“Yeah, we’re here. Uh. Ok, so this is going to sound crazy, but just hear me out—we think you’re in *Sleeping Beauty*.” Steve stared at the radio, where he could hear Max hissing something in the background.

“Run that by me one more time,” he said.

“Ok, so apparently the Mindflayer is trying to prevent us from rescuing Billy, and our hypothesis is that it wanted to try something new since we got Will back last time, and...” Dustin cut off and Steve heard another short, whispered conversation. “And so it’s using Billy’s memories to keep us away from him, and Billy’s favorite book is—seriously?” Dustin said to someone else, and then he was talking into the radio again. “His favorite book is *The Complete Grimm’s Fairy Tales*, apparently.” Steve raised an eyebrow, and then a thought occurred to him.

“Isn’t there a fucking dragon in *Sleeping Beauty*?” he asked, looking around uneasily.

“Uh,” Dustin said, and then there was a pause and a thump. When the radio crackled to life again, Steve heard Max’s voice.

“Steve?” she asked.

“What’s up, Max?” She sighed heavily, and Steve could picture the accompanying eye roll perfectly.

“You’re probably not in the Disney version,” she said, “so no dragon. Billy likes the original fairy tales, so this is much more of a *Briar Rose* situation.” Steve paused for a long moment.

“I have no idea what that means, Max.” She sighed again.

“It’s the original. It’s different. I have to go home and get the book so we can figure out exactly what we’re working with, but I seem to recall it being less dramatic than the Disney version.”

“Ok,” Steve said. “That’s good, I guess.”

“Dustin says go ahead and approach the castle, but be careful. Also,” Max lowered her voice, “Billy’s kind of sensitive about the liking fairy tales thing, so when you find him, just...be cool about it?”

“I wasn’t going to be a dick about it, Max,” Steve said a little defensively, and it was mostly true. He hadn’t been planning to make fun of Billy for it. Not much, anyway.

“Ok. Well, be careful,” she replied.

“Will do.” Steve stowed the radio and kept walking. He arrived at the castle faster than it seemed like he should have. He stared up at the impenetrable forest of thorns ahead of him and wondered what to do next. He settled on making a circuit around the castle, just to see if there was any break in the wall of thorns. There wasn’t, though Steve did discover that the vines started moving threateningly if he got close enough to touch them, and he barely avoided being impaled by one of the massive thorns at one point. He kept his distance after that.

By the time he finished his circuit, the radio was crackling to life again.

“Hey buddy, you there?” Dustin asked.

“Yeah. It’s not going well. There doesn’t seem to be any way to get past the vines.”

“About that,” Dustin said, and Steve didn’t like his tone. “There’s good news and bad news.” Steve sighed.

“Hit me with it,” he said.

“No dragon, so that’s good. *Briar Rose* is kind of surprisingly anticlimactic, so you probably don’t have to fight anything.”

“What’s the bad news?”

“The vines open by themselves...after a hundred years have passed.” Steve let out a long breath.

“What the *fuck*?” he said, before he could stop himself.

“It’s kind of genius, if you think about it—“

“Dustin, I do not need to hear about how genius the Mindflayer is right at this moment, ok?” Dustin’s voice was quiet when he responded.

“Sure, yeah. Sorry.”

“So what’s the plan?” Steve eventually asked. “I assume it’s something crazy.”

“I don’t...we don’t really have a plan, Steve. I don’t know that there’s anything we can do.” Steve took that in, and then he thought about Max’s face when Billy had fallen at Starcourt. He thought about the terrible, burning hope in her eyes when El had called to say that someone was trapped in the Upside Down. They knew, by then, that it wasn’t Hopper. Steve wondered what Max’s face looked like right now, as she listened. He stood up and straightened his shoulders. When he spoke, his voice was firm.

“Ok, well, I’ll wait here until you make a plan, because we’re not leaving Billy here.”

“Steve, he’s—“

“Dustin, I don’t care how that sentence ends. He’s Max’s brother, and he saved El, and we’re not leaving him here.”

“But—“

“You guys are smart—figure it out.” Steve’s tone left no room for argument. There was a long silence. Finally, the radio crackled again.

“We’ll get back to you,” Max said a little breathlessly. “Thanks, Steve,” she added, in a softer voice.

Steve went back to pacing around the castle, the thorns just as impenetrable as they had been before. Steve poked at some of them, and then lunged backwards as the thorns poked back.

“Fuck you,” he muttered at them the third or fourth time it happened. “You don’t get to win.” It took a long time for the kids to get back to him, and when they did, Dustin didn’t sound happy.

“Steve?”

“Yeah, I’m here.” Dustin sighed.

“I want it stated at the outset that I hate this plan,” he said.

“Understood.”

“Ok, so we talked to El and Will. The Mindflayer is messing with your perception, which means it’s kind of messing with reality. Which means that reality is a little flexible there, right now. Does that make sense?”

“Nope. But keep going.”

“Time is one aspect of reality, which means that time is also potentially flexible.”

“Ok,” Steve said, “but I can’t do anything about that, right?”

“Right,” Dustin said, “but El could.”

“Dustin, El’s not even in Hawkins. And there’s no way in hell that either Joyce or Hopper is going to sign off on sending her back into the Upside Down.” Steve said. “It’s way too dangerous.”

“You’re down there,” Dustin pointed out.

“That’s different?” Steve said, but it came out as a question. “Anyway, it’s not an option.”

“Yeah, we know,” Dustin said slowly. “That’s not the plan.” He sighed. “El’s going to look for you and get inside your head. Then she’s going to help you try to push back on the Mindflayer’s version of reality. It’s possible that the two of you together can reshape that reality so that we meet the time limit.”

“Okay,” Steve said slowly.

“All you really have to do is believe, very firmly, that time is a construct,” Dustin said.

“Got it,” said Steve, though he didn’t, really. “That sounds like a good plan.”

“No, Steve! That does not sound like a good plan!” Dustin replied.

“Why not?” Steve asked.

“Because you’re taking all the risks! Trying to manipulate reality in there makes you vulnerable to the Mindflayer. It can’t get to El through you, but it can get to you.”

“And do what?” Steve asked after a pause.

“I don’t know, melt your brain?”

“Wait, really?”

“I mean, yeah, maybe. We call it the Mindflayer for a reason.” Steve thought about it.

“I’m assuming there’s not a backup plan,” he finally said. Dustin didn’t reply immediately, and then he sighed heavily.

“There is not.”

“Ok, then we’re doing it,” Steve said decisively. There was no response. “Dustin?”

“Don’t die, ok?” Dustin finally said.

“I’ll do my best, buddy.”

“Ok. El’s going to reach out to you. Be careful.”

“Always.” Steve sat down to wait. He felt it when El made contact, like a tingle at the back of his mind. He felt hazy, like he couldn’t quite tune in to what was happening in his head or what was happening in front of him, but after a few minutes, it started to clear. He found that he knew exactly what it was that he was supposed to do, and he felt the power to do it, the potential, shimmering through him.

“Okay, kiddo,” he said, “let’s give it a shot.” There was no direct response, but Steve felt something like amusement from the back of his mind. He approached the wall of thorns and stopped a safe distance away. Then he closed his eyes and *pushed* on the reality around him. He could feel how thin it was, how artificial. It wasn’t real, and he could work with that.

He was so absorbed in his task, painstakingly rewriting reality to conform to his needs, that he almost didn't notice when the Mindflayer lashed out. The world simply *changed* around him, and he opened his eyes to find that he was back in the Upside Down that he had initially expected.

"Nope," he said, and reached out for the reality he had just left. He could feel it bleeding back in around the edges, the grass and the castle solidifying in front of him. "Come on," he said through gritted teeth, "come ON." He gripped harder and felt an oppressive darkness pushing back at him. He shoved back as hard as he could, clinging to an absolute conviction that the world was what he wanted it to be. He took a step closer to the vines around the castle, and one lashed out. He ignored the stabbing pain in his arm and slapped a hand to the vines. He gathered all of his strength for a final push and shoved all of his conviction out in front of him.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then reality *rippled* around him, starting from where his hand was pressed to the vines. The thorns vanished, replaced by blooming flowers. A path opened up in front of him, leading straight to the front door of the castle. Steve felt a surge of victory, and then he felt the presence at the back of his mind disappear. All of his strength suddenly deserted him. He tried to cling to consciousness, but he dropped to his knees as he felt it slip away from him.

When Steve came to, he was laid out on the grass a little ways from the castle. He wasn't wearing his goggles or his bandana. He sat up with a jerk and looked around a little frantically. He was startled to see Billy stretched out next to him, leaning back on his elbows and looking up at the sky. Steve looked back at the castle and saw that it was now covered in flowering vines. There was no sign of the Mindflayer, inside or outside of Steve's head.

"So you're alive," Steve said to Billy, rubbing his temples, which were throbbing.

"Looks that way," Billy said casually, but Steve could see the relief on his face. Upon closer inspection, Billy looked rough. He had dark circles under his eyes, and he had lost weight in the time that he had been in the Upside Down. Steve saw that there was a faint tremor

running through his body.

“How do you feel about getting out of here?” Steve asked.

“Pretty good,” Billy replied, eyes still on the sky, “but there’s something we should do first. Just in case.” Steve’s brow furrowed. He looked around. He opened his mouth to ask what they could possibly still have left to do, and was caught off guard when Billy leaned in and kissed him. Steve froze for a moment and then relaxed into it, one hand coming up to Billy’s face. Billy pulled back and looked at Steve, fear and hope written all over his face.

“So that’s how the fairy tale ends?” Steve asked, and Billy nodded. He glanced over at the castle.

“The castle looks the way I always pictured it. I don’t know why the fuck it’s here, but I do know how the story goes.”

“We should probably be absolutely sure,” Steve said slowly, and leaned back in. Billy smiled into the kiss. It was only Steve’s radio crackling to life, and the frantic yelling coming from it that finally drove them apart.

“Time to go,” Steve said, and hauled Billy to his feet, “but we’re circling back to that once we get out of here.” Billy sagged a little in his grip, struggling to make his limbs cooperate, but his grin was the same predatory one that had always made Steve a little too warm.

“Whatever you say, princess,” he said.

“Pretty sure you’re the princess in this scenario,” Steve pointed out, as they made their slow way toward the exit. Billy scoffed, but he didn’t argue. He did, however, blush a delightful shade of pink.

Author’s Note:

I feel like these make less sense with every passing day, but I'm enjoying myself, and that's the important thing.